



Article

Filling in the Blanks: Developing a Library Orientation for Incoming Community College Students

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Abstract

Library orientation literature suggests a need for hands-on activities to reinforce learning outcomes. Cleveland State Community College Library, while constrained by time, staffing, and renovation, was able to collaborate with the campus orientation committee to develop an interactive, activity-based library orientation session during the college new student orientation.

Cleveland State Community College is a two-year non-residential college operated within the Tennessee Board of Regents system. The school serves approximately 3500 for-credit students (FTE 2200) from the surrounding counties of Bradley, McMinn, Meigs, Monroe, and Polk. The average student age is 25.9 (Cleveland State Community College, 2012).

During the Fall 2010 semester, the college introduced an optional orientation program for new students called Freshman Frenzy. Coordinated by a small committee composed of members from a variety of campus departments, the event was designed to introduce incoming students to campus services and resources. During the first two years of the event, the college library functioned as a location for students to have their campus ID cards made. Informal library tours were offered by Admissions Office staff. Incentives were based upon attending individual sessions, with additional prizes offered for completing event evaluations.

The 2012 event marked the first time that students were required to complete a campus-wide “passport” in order to be eligible to win event drawings. All event participants received campus passports listing a variety of campus services and presentations, such as “Transition from High School to College” and the Math Lab. Students gained unique passport stamps by attending each presentation. All students who collected the required number of passport stamps, including several required stops, were registered to win prizes such as an iPad or a restaurant gift certificate.

During initial planning for the 2012 event, the library director proposed to the event committee that the library function as an academic station during the event, rather than simply as a location for creating student IDs. After some discussion about how the library could be more fully integrated with the campus event, the library was placed among the required stops for all students attending the event.

The Cleveland State librarians began to brainstorm creative ways of introducing new students to library resources and services. In 2011, the library performed student outreach by handing out promotional library-themed bags and ear buds, but the librarians hoped to expand student outreach by emphasizing how library services and resources could benefit students.

The library collections and services have traditionally worked most heavily with students in the general transfer and nursing programs, but the Freshman Frenzy event provided an opportunity to reach a broader range of incoming students. Librarians wanted to highlight Web-based library services, including online research guides and self-paced online information literacy tutorials, and building-based library services such as in-person research assistance.

However, several serious limitations were placed on library staff: staffing numbers, library renovation, and time. During the normal academic year, the Cleveland State Library staff is comprised of three full-time librarians and four full-time staff members. During the 2012 New Student Orientation, however, changes in staffing resulted in only one full-time staff member. As part of building renovations, the library was also in a

state of transition, with empty book shelves greeting visitors. Finally, student time in the library was necessarily limited to approximately 10 to 15 minutes. What would be the best ways to maximize this time? Librarians knew that they wanted to develop activities that were engaging, authentic, and outcome-based, but also activities that could be implemented with a very limited number of staff in a transitional library space, and completed within a short time frame.

Literature Review

Library orientation literature suggests a need for hands-on activities to reinforce learning outcomes. Bonwell and Eison (1991) define active learning as “instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing.” Students involved in active learning “must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.” Examples of active learning methods include cooperative learning, experiential learning, and problem-based learning.

The research on active learning indicates that students tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement and motivation. Active learning techniques have also been found to promote student retention of information (Prince, 2004). Ross and Furno (2011) note that active learning strategies can reach a wider range of learning styles and preferences than lecture-based class sessions can.

Active learning methods, such as collaborative and experiential learning, have generally been accepted in the library field as instructional best practices, as noted in the Association of College and Research Libraries’ *Characteristics of programs of information literacy that illustrate best practices: A guideline* (“Category 7: Pedagogy”, 2012). Many libraries have begun offering active, hands-on sessions for both course-based instruction and for student introductions to the library building and services. In a library orientation context, active learning opportunities often translate into treasure hunts and activities for students exploring the library, as opposed to physical tours of the library. A selection of examples from the library orientation literature indicates this trend.

Aiming “to provide [students with] a positive, welcoming, first experience with the campus library” (2003), Marcus and Beck developed a treasure hunt introducing students to the library with a series of sequential written clues. Based on student feedback, Marcus and Beck concluded that the goal-oriented, self-paced nature of this activity made it successful with students.

Behr, Bundza, and Cockrell (2007) write about the development of a library orientation session to recruit prospective students. After reviewing the professional literature on creating programming for a “millennial generation” of students, the authors note the importance of including a sense of fun, competition, and collaboration in activities. The librarians developed a series of small group-based 5-minute activities introducing prospective students to a variety of library services and library resources. Student feedback indicated that the collaborative and social aspects of the activity were most

beneficial to them. The authors note that campus collaboration was also an important benefit of the event.

Smith and Baker (2011) describe the creation of two ambitious library orientation games for incoming students. Based on the board game Clue, the physical library orientation game required students to solve a mystery by discovering clues placed throughout the library. While student feedback reported increased comfort level with the library, initial feedback also indicated some student confusion about game rules and procedures. The library's next orientation game was based on the online game World of Warcraft. This game was an online, self-paced introduction to library resources and services, requiring students to answer clues throughout the game. While engaging and interactive, development of both these activities did require heavy staff time involvement, as well as computer game programming skills. Smith and Baker concluded that successful orientation activities require consideration of a broad range of incoming student knowledge levels, as well as faculty support.

McGrath (2011) introduced an orientation program for first year students at Southern Adventist University based upon the passport model. Stations throughout the library focused on library services and resources, including study areas and the library website. Students successfully completing each of the five activities received a passport stamp. Based on positive student and faculty feedback, McGrath concludes that the event had been a success.

Methodology

Based on staffing, time, and location restrictions, Cleveland State librarians decided to modify aspects of previous successful library orientation activities, both from the professional literature and from their own experience in offering course-based library orientation sessions. With the ultimate goal of conveying the message that the library could help students achieve better grades with less time invested, the library director decided to develop a series of stations within the library to control student traffic and flow. The director worked with the librarians to develop goals for each station. After a group discussion, the librarians decided to emphasize three major areas of library services: research assistance, online library services available through the library's main website, and the library's social media presence. Promotional materials such as library bags and ear buds would be distributed by volunteer faculty members at a location outside of the library.

Librarians decided to create three stations that would engage students at a wide variety of knowledge levels. Each student who successfully completed all three stations would receive a library passport stamp, qualifying students for the event-wide drawings. The research assistance station development required the most discussion. Ultimately, the librarians decided to develop a library research-themed Mad Libs activity, or Library Libs, as the activity was dubbed by library staff (see Appendix A). This activity emphasized the open-ended nature of research and encouraged student creativity and collaboration. Library Libs was completed in small groups of 10 to 20 students. A librarian asked students to suggest a word for the pre-established Library Libs word

prompts. The librarian then recorded student responses on a whiteboard at the front of the room, before verbally filling in the student-completed Library Libs for the group.

For the next station, librarians decided to create a crossword puzzle activity that asked students to identify specific online library resources and services listed on the library's homepage (see Appendix B). The self-paced nature of this activity allowed students with a wide range of learning backgrounds and skills to complete the activity with minimal librarian assistance. Students were seated in the library's instruction computer lab. After a brief orientation from a librarian, students could complete the activity using information located on the library website.

For the final station, students were asked to discover the library's social media presence. Two library circulation desk computers were provided for students to either "like" the library's Facebook page or to comment on the library's blog. Library staff were on hand to assist and to troubleshoot computer issues. Once students had completed all three library stations, they received a passport stamp.

Results and Lessons Learned

During the event, 146 crossword puzzles were completed, a rough estimate for the number of students who completed the majority of library orientation activities. Library Facebook fans rose from 64 fans before the event to 178 fans after the event.

The library scored relatively well in both formal and informal Freshman Frenzy evaluations. In the formal campus evaluation of the event, the library received the highest marks out of all the academic orientation activities. Out of the 26 total student evaluations, 12 students (46%) rated the library session as "excellent." Six students (23%) rated the library session as "good." Only two students (7%) rated the library session as "average." Six students (23%) did not respond. In discussions after the event, library staff mentioned that they were impressed that the event had been received so well. In addition, many students laughed during the Library Libs segment of the orientation. Thirty three students commented on the library blog, and the majority of blog comments were encouraging. One student commented: "Thank you so much for coming up with a fun way to teach us about the library and the many services you offer." Another student wrote: "Thanks so much for making me feel welcome [--] you have a very freindly [sic] staff." While it must be taken into account that library staff was standing behind students as they commented on the blog, and so written student comments may not represent the full spectrum of student opinion, student blog comments indicated that the library had been successful in introducing a number of students to library services and staff members.

While the event was generally received positively by students, several unforeseen technology issues arose during the activities. It soon emerged that not all students who used social networks such as Facebook had their passwords memorized. In addition, the computer's Internet browser cookies had to be enabled at a certain level after each individual Facebook user, in order to allow a new Facebook user to log into Facebook and to like the library page. Rather than use library computers, several students opted

to like the library page using their smart phones or other mobile devices. Some staff members expressed frustration that it could be difficult to verify whether or not a student had actually liked the library page.

Allowing students to comment on the library's blog had initially been conceived as an opportunity for students without Facebook accounts to participate in the event, but many of the students who chose to comment on the library blog simply did not remember their Facebook login information. Library staff realized that the Internet browser cookies would need to be deleted manually after each individual blog comment in order to record a new blog comment by a new commenter on the same computer.

In the future, the library may update the social media portion of the orientation to include provisions for the increasing number of mobile users. The library plans to develop a set-up that includes three separate lines for students: one track for students to like the library's Facebook page using library computers, one track for students to like the library's Facebook page using mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet devices, and one track for students to comment on the library's blog using library computers.

Campus support and buy-in remains crucial. Without the support from the event committee, the library would not have been integrated into the campus event or the reward structure. The library staff enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with this committee and plans to reprise this event in upcoming new student orientations.

The Cleveland State librarians and library staff were generally pleased with the results of the new library orientation activities. The event was a success in allowing the library to coordinate with other campus departments, introducing incoming students to the library, and increasing student awareness of library resources. The Library Libs activity has already been effectively adapted to use in some course-based library orientation sessions. The library staff plans to use the lessons learned from this event to continue to improve and expand the library's role in upcoming campus orientations for new students and campus awareness of library resources.

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Appendix A: Library Libs Activity Worksheet



Freshman Frenzy 2012: Library Libs

- A school subject
- An animal
- A high school name
- A website
- A superhero
- A celebrity
- An exotic location
- An exclamation
- An adjective
- Natural disaster
- Country
- Another website

One afternoon, a student walked up to the librarian and said:

"I have to write a paper for my ____ class on the endangered ____.
When I went to _____ my teachers let me use _____ to look
things up."

The librarian replied:

"You came to the right place. Think of me as your own personal
_____. The Cleveland State library has everything you need to write
your paper. We have print books, e-books and thousands of articles on
topics ranging from _____ to _____."

The student exclaimed:

"_____, I never knew the library had so much _____ and awesome
stuff!"

A couple of weeks later, the student came back to the library:

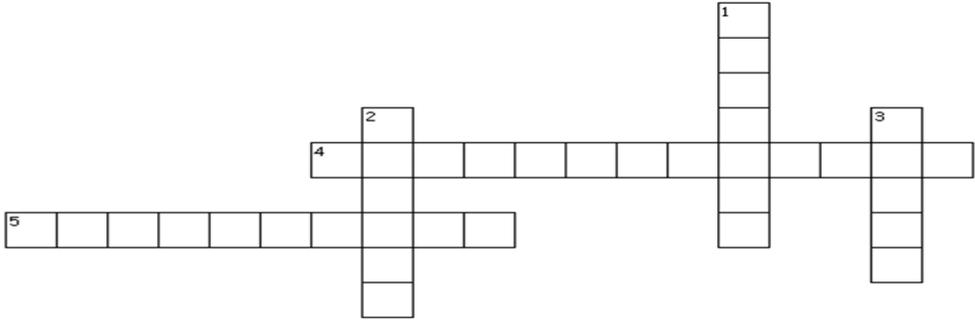
"Thanks for all your help, I decided to write about the _____ in
_____ instead, but I used the library website instead of _____
and I got an A on my paper!"

Developed by Andy Foskey, Cleveland State Community College, 2012

Appendix B: Crossword Puzzle Activity Worksheet



Freshman Frenzy 2012: Library Website Challenge



Down

1. Library _____ Guides (examples include American History and Biology)
2. The name of one electronic book collection
3. The name of the library special collections

Across

4. The name of the library blog
5. The name of the library tutorial